

[Click here](#) to read more about the health care reform legislation by March 21 in the House.

The U.S. House on Sunday passed historic health care reform legislation with the support of Rep. Peter Welch. A pair of bills approved by the House will extend access to health care to 32 million Americans, end abusive insurance company practices and cut the deficit by \$138 billion over the next ten years and by \$1.2 trillion the following decade.

The House passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590) by a vote of 219 to 212 and the Reconciliation Act of 2010 (H.R. 4872) by a vote of 220 to 211. Having already been approved by the Senate, H.R. 3590 will be sent to President Obama for his signature, while H.R. 4872, which makes immediate improvements to H.R. 3590, will be sent to the Senate for consideration.

"Tonight, we faced the choice of accepting the status quo or moving toward a system in which every American has access to quality, affordable health care and every American helps pay for it. We faced a choice between allowing health insurance companies to continue to cherry-pick their customers or making health care affordable for all families and all small businesses," Welch said.

"Tonight's vote is a victory for hard-working Americans who will no longer have to worry about a sick child receiving care or being bankrupted by a serious illness. It is a victory for seniors who will no longer have to worry about filling the gap in their Medicare prescription drug coverage. And it is a victory for small businesses who struggle every day to pay employee premiums.

"While this legislation will not solve all our nation's health care problems, it sets us firmly and confidently down the path toward a system that works for all Americans."

The legislation will provide tax credits and other assistance to 156,000 Vermont families and to more than 20,000 small businesses to help them afford coverage. It will extend coverage to 17,500 uninsured Vermonters and guarantee that 7,000 Vermonters with preexisting conditions will not be punished by their insurance companies. It will close the prescription drug "donut hole" for 106,000 Vermont seniors and extend the solvency of Medicare for a decade.

The legislation passed Sunday night prohibits discrimination based on gender, health status or preexisting condition, and it holds insurance companies responsible for keeping premiums manageable. It creates new, competitive health insurance marketplaces from which families and small businesses can buy affordable health insurance. It takes key steps toward replacing the fee-for-service model of health care system to one that incentivizes value, not volume.

Thanks to the leadership of Sen. Patrick Leahy, the legislation recognizes Vermont's early investment in expanding health coverage with an additional \$100 million in Medicaid funding.

In addition to the health provisions included in the bill, H.R. 4872 incorporates much of the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which was passed by the House in September 2009. The education provisions in the bill constitute the single largest investment in college financial aid in history, increasing Pell Grants by \$36 billion over ten years and expanding the Perkins Loan program to every college in the country.

The education provisions are paid for by replacing for-profit lenders with direct loans to students and families. The Vermont delegation, following the lead of Sen. Bernie Sanders, included a provision that will ensure that Vermont's non-profit lender – the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation – will continue to issue loans and provide critical outreach services.

Rep. Welch spoke on the floor of the House Sunday afternoon in support of the bill. [Click here](#) to watch his remarks.

On Monday evening at 7:40 p.m., Welch will hold an hour long statewide telephone town hall meeting with Vermonters to answer questions about the legislation (Dial 1-877-269-7289 and enter PIN 13785).